



Exposing Underground Utility Lines

Requirements and Best Practices

Prepared by
Virginia State Corporation Commission
Division of Utility and Railroad Safety

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Excavating Within Two Feet of Marks

Virginia law requires you follow certain steps when excavating within two feet on either side of the staked or marked location of an underground utility line.

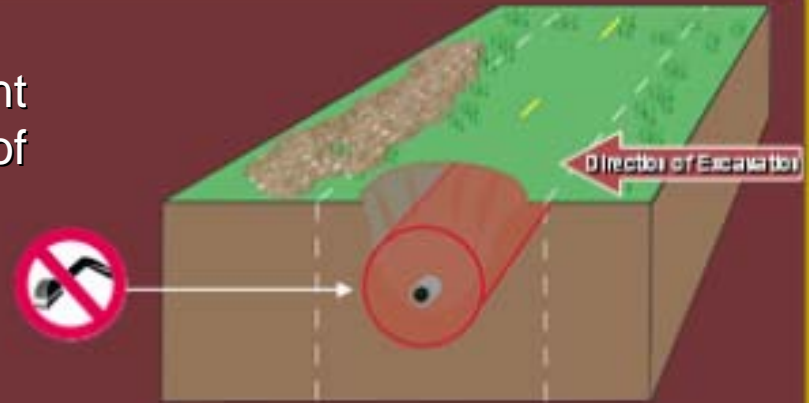
Such steps include, but may not be limited to:

1. Exposing the utility line to its extremities by hand digging before beginning the proposed excavation.



Excavating Within Two Feet of Marks

2. Not using mechanized equipment within two feet of the extremities of all exposed utility lines.



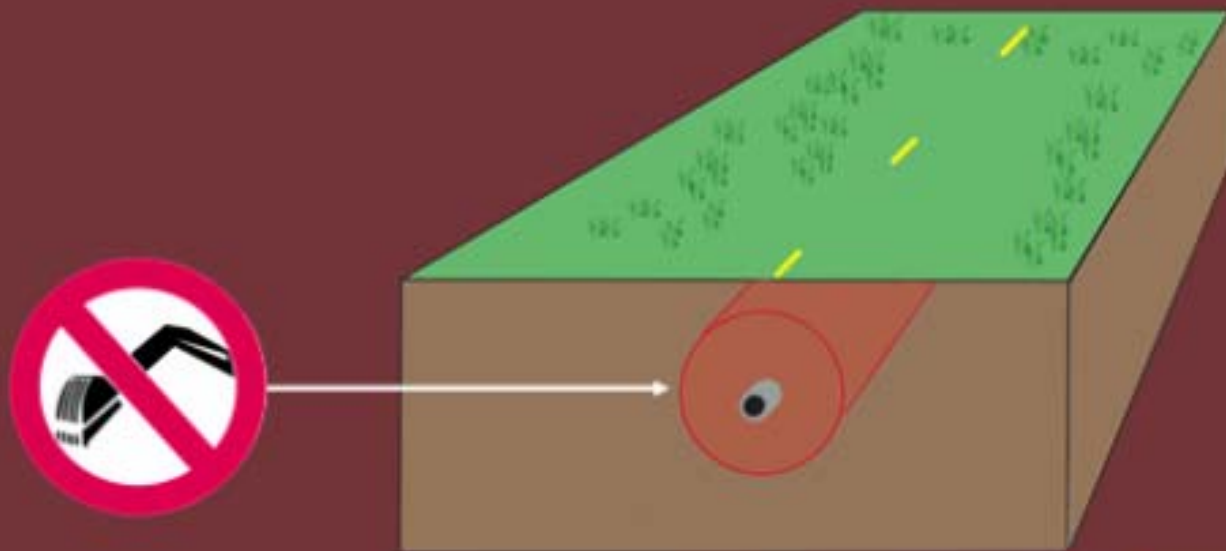
3. Protecting the exposed utility lines from damage.

In addition, for excavations parallel to an existing utility line, such steps shall include, but may not be limited to, hand digging at reasonable distances along the line of excavation.



Excavating Within Two Feet of Marks

Commission Rule 20VAC5-309-120. requires that excavators maintain a reasonable clearance, to include the width of the utility line plus **two (2) feet** between the marked or staked location of an underground utility line and the cutting edge or point of any mechanized equipment. Consider the known limit of control of the cutting edge or point to avoid damaging underground utility lines.



Exposing Underground Utility Lines

Best Practices

- Use soft digging whenever possible.
- Use only rounded/blunt edged tools when hand digging in the vicinity of utility lines. The use of axes, posthole diggers, picks, mattocks and pry/probing bars may result in damage.
- Carefully begin potholing an area to the side of the marked utility line. Keep the face of the shovel parallel with the utility line markings.



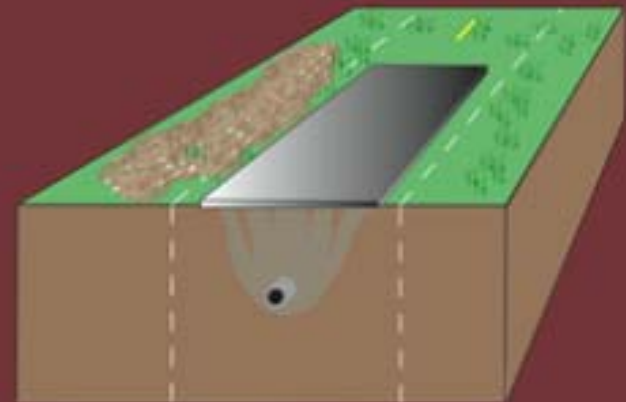
Potholing Best Practices

- Begin extending the pothole walls toward the utility line.
- Once the utility line is visible, keep the face of the shovel parallel with the utility line, and use all precautions to remove the soil from around the utility line.



Potholing Best Practices

- Fully expose the extremities of the utility line.
- Protect all exposed utility lines from damage that could result from falling debris, i.e. rocks, concrete, compacted soil etc. and from equipment and persons working in the vicinity of the exposed utility line.



Potholing Best Practices

- Be aware of changes in grass color, terrain and soil types. These changes often indicate a prior disturbance of soil.
- Be aware of any softening of the soil you are digging in. This is often an indication that you are in a ditch line.
- Be aware of patches in pavement that could indicate where utilities had been previously uncovered.
- Use extreme caution when warning tapes are uncovered. Utilities are in close proximity.
- Use rounded/blunt edge tools whenever possible.
- Take all precautions and wear all applicable personal protective equipment.

Potholing Best Practices



- Don't** be aggressive when digging in close proximity to utility lines.
- Don't** pry against a utility line to remove soil.
- Don't** become frustrated if you can not find a utility line right away. This will lead to carelessness and eventual damage to the utility line.
- Don't** take for granted that a utility line will be at a certain depth.
- Don't** expose excessive lengths of a utility line without proper support.

Potholing Best Practices

Don't leave utility lines exposed when unattended.

Don't relocate utility lines unless authorized and supervised by the utility line owner/operator.



The End